CLAIMS

The embodiments of the invention in which an exclusive property or privilege is claimed are defined as follows:

1   1.   A method for developing an order for a product, comprising:

2   establishing an order for a product, wherein said order includes a first

3   component associated with said product and said order includes a non-binding

4   attribute associated with said first component;

5   determining a second component that satisfies said non-binding attribute

6   for said order; and

7   exchanging said first component with said second component in said

8   order.

1   2.   The method of claim 1, wherein said order comprises a legal contract.

1   3.   The method of claim 1, wherein said establishing an order for a product includes

2   at least one of the following:

3   providing a notification to a customer regarding said non-binding

4   attribute;

5   receiving an order for said product;

6   allowing a customer to select a plurality of components for said product,

7   wherein said first component is one of said plurality of components;

8   allowing a customer to select said product and said non-binding attribute;

9   providing a notification to a customer regarding said first component and

10   said second component and receiving consent from said customer to said non-

11   binding attribute;

12   providing at least two options regarding at least one component for said

13   product and allowing a customer to select from among said two options; and

14   providing a request to a customer regarding a non-binding attribute

15   associated with said first component.

1   4.   The method of claim 1, further comprising:

2   determining a need for said first component outside said order;

1   5.   The method of claim 4, wherein said determining a need for said first component

2 outside said order includes at least one of the following:

3   receiving a notification regarding a new order that requires said first

4 component;

5   determining that said order cannot be completely fulfilled due to a

6 shortage of said first component;

7   receiving a new order that requires an amount of said first component such

8 that both said order and said new order cannot be filled if both said order and said

9 new order use said first component;

10   determining that said order cannot be partially or completely filled due to

11 defects detected in said first component;

12   determining that a change in price for said first component makes it

13 disadvantageous to fill said order with said first component;

14   determining that a change in price for a second component makes it

15 disadvantageous to fill said order with said first component;

16   determining that a change in projected supply for said first component

17 makes it disadvantageous to fill said order with said first component;

18   determining that a change in projected supply for a second component

19 makes it disadvantageous to fill said order with said first component;

20   determining that a projected change in price for said first component

21 makes it disadvantageous to fill said order with said first component;

22   determining that a projected change in price for a second component

23 makes it disadvantageous to fill said order with said first component;

24   establishing a new order that requires said first component; and

25   receiving an indication of a potential new order that requires said first

26   component.

1   6.   The method of claim 1, wherein said determining a second component that

2 satisfies said non-binding attribute for said order includes at least one of the following:

3   identifying a component that can replace said first component in said

4   product and satisfy said non-binding attribute;

5   selecting said second component from a plurality of components identified

6   in said order as replacements for said first component;

7   receiving a notification of a selection of said second component;

8   providing a notification of availability of said second component;

9   receiving a request to exchange said first component with said second

10   component;

11   receiving consent to exchange said first component with said second

12   component;

13   providing a notification to a customer of at least one component that

14   satisfies said non-binding attribute;

15   confirming availability of said second component; and

16   confirming ability of said second component to satisfy said non-binding

17   attribute.

1   7.   The method of claim 1, wherein said exchanging said first component with said

2 second component in said order includes at least one of the following:

3   using said second component but not said first component when building

4   said product;

5   fulfilling said order using said second component but not said first

6   component;

7   using said second component but not said first component when providing

8   said product; and

9   including said second component in said product.

1   8.   The method of claim 1, wherein said non-binding attribute relates to at least one

2   of the following:

3   a quality level of said first component;

4   a performance level of said first component;

5   a feature set of said first component;

6   a delivery date for said first component;

7   a color of said first component;

8   a size of said first component;

9   a storage capacity of said first component;

10   a bandwidth of said first component;

11   a weight of said first component;

12   a technical capability of said first component;

13   an expiration date;

14   a purity level;

15   a service level;

16   a warranty level;

17   a price; and

18   a dimension associated with said first component.

1   9.   The method of claim 1, further comprising:

2   providing a notification regarding said exchanging said first component

3   with said second component.

1   10.   The method of claim 1, further comprising:

2   fulfilling said order using said second component.

1 11. The method of claim 1, further comprising:

2   adjusting a price associated with said order as a result of said exchanging

3 said first component with said second component.

1 12. The method of claim 11, further comprising:

2   providing a notification regarding said price.

1 13. The method of claim 1, further comprising:

2   establishing a second order using said first component.

1 14. The method of claim 13, wherein said order is established with a first customer

2 and said second order is established with a second customer.

1 15. The method of claim 1, wherein said order identifies at least one characteristic

2 associated with said product.

1 16. The method of claim 15, further comprising:

2   receiving identification of said at least one characteristic regarding said

3 order.

1 17. The method of claim 15, further comprising:

2   determining said second component based, at least in part, on said

3 characteristic.

1 18. The method of claim 15, further comprising:

2   determining said non-binding attribute based, at least in part, on said

3 characteristic.

1   19.   The method of claim 15, wherein said determining a second component that

2   satisfies said non-binding attribute for said order includes selecting said second

3   component based, at last in part, on said characteristic.

1   20.   The method of claim 15, wherein said at least one characteristic includes at least

2   one of the following:

3   an acceptable lower bound of said at least one characteristic;

4   an acceptable upper bound of said at least one characteristic;

5   a range of acceptable characteristics;

6   a range of unacceptable characteristics;

7   a rule regarding exchange of said first component with said second

8   component;

9   a condition that must be met if said first component is exchanged with said

10   second component;

11   a set of at least one acceptable characteristic for said product;

12   a set of at least one acceptable characteristic for said first component;

13   a set of at least one acceptable characteristic for said second component;

14   a set of at least one unacceptable characteristic for said product;

15   a set of at least one unacceptable characteristic for said first component;

16   and

17   a set of at least one unacceptable characteristic for said second component.

1   21.   The method of claim 15, further comprising:

2   identifying said at least one characteristic.

1   22.   The method of claim 15, wherein said at least one characteristic is based on at

2   least one of the following:

3   volume of said product included in said order;

4   quantity of said product included in said order;

5   quality of said product;

6   quality of said first component;

7   quality of said second component;

8   demand for said product;

9   demand for said first component;

10   demand for said second component;

11   supply for said product;

12   supply for said first component;

13   supply for said second component;

14   availability of said first component;

15   availability of said second component;

16   an amount in inventory of said product;

17   an amount in inventory of said first component;

18   an amount in inventory of said second component;

19   an expected profit margin for said product wherein said product includes

20   said first component;

21   an expected profit margin for said product wherein said product includes

22   said second component;

23   a discount available for said product;

24   a price of said product;

25   a price of said first component;

26   a price of said second component

27   projected demand for said product;

28   projected demand for said first component;

29   projected demand for said second component;

30   projected supply for said product;

31   projected supply for said first component;

32   projected supply for said second component;

33   projected availability of said first component;

34   projected availability of said second component;

35   projected amount in inventory of said product;

36   projected amount in inventory of said first component;

37   projected amount in inventory of said second component;

38   a projected price of said product;

39   a projected price of said first component; and

40   a projected price of said second component.

1   23.   The method of claim 15, wherein said characteristic is identified by at least one of

2   the following:

3   a party placing said order;

4   a supplier of said product;

5   a supplier of said first component;

6   a supplier of said second component;

7   an expert system;

8   a rule-based system;

9   a supply chain management decision support system;

10   a supplier relationship management decision support system;

11   a production control decision support system;

12   a forecasting system;

13   an optimization system;

14   an order model; and

15   a customer model.

1   24.   The method of claim 1, wherein said order specifies different prices for different

2   configurations of said product.

1   25.   The method of claim 1, further comprising:

2   determining said non-binding attribute.

1   26.   The method of claim 1, further comprising:

2   providing said product.

1   27.   A method for fulfilling an order for a product, comprising:

2   establishing an order, wherein said order identifies an initial configuration

3   for a product and at least one non-binding attribute associated with said initial

4   configuration;

5   after said order is established, determining an alternate configuration for

6   said product in accordance with said at least one non-binding attribute; and

7   fulfilling said order in accordance with said alternate configuration.

1   28.   The method of claim 27, wherein said establishing an order includes at least one

2   of the following:

3   providing a notification to a customer regarding said non-binding

4   attribute;

5   receiving an order for said product from a customer;

6   receiving a request from a customer for said product in said initial

7   configuration;

8   allowing a customer to select a plurality of components for said product;

9   allowing a customer to select said product and said non-binding attribute;

10   allowing a customer to select said product and said initial configuration;

11   providing a notification to a customer regarding said initial configuration

12   and receiving consent from said customer to said non-binding attribute;

13   providing at least two options regarding said initial configuration for said

14   product and allowing a customer to select from among said at least two options;

15   providing at least two options regarding at least one component for said

16   product and allowing a customer to select from among said at least two options;

17   providing at least two options regarding said non-binding attribute and

18   allowing a customer to select from among said at least two options; and

41

19   providing a request to a customer regarding said non-binding attribute.

1   29.   The method of claim 27, wherein said determining an alternate configuration for

2   said product in accordance with said at least one non-binding attribute includes at least

3   one of the following:

4   selecting an alternate configuration permitted in said order;

5   determining a component that can replace another component in the

6   product and satisfy the non-binding attribute;

7   determining a component that can replace another component in said

8   product and satisfy said non-binding attribute;

9   receiving a notification of a selection of an alternative component for said

10   product;

11   receiving consent to exchange said initial configuration with said alternate

12   configuration;

13   providing a notification of availability of said alternate configuration;

14   receiving a request to exchange said initial configuration with said

15   alternate configuration;

16   providing a notification to a customer of at least one component that

17   satisfies said non-binding attribute and is usable in said alternate configuration;

18   providing a notification to a customer of at least one component that is

19   unavailable for use in said initial configuration;

20   providing a notification to a customer of at least one component that is

21   available for use in said alternate configuration; and

22   confirming ability of a component to satisfy said non-binding attribute.

1   30.   The method of claim 27, wherein said fulfilling said order in accordance with said

2   alternate configuration includes at least one of the following:

3   providing a notification that said order is provided in accordance with said

4   alternate configuration;

Attorney Docket No 101 058

5		providing a notification that said product is provided in accordance with
6		said alternate configuration;
7		building said product in accordance with said alternate configuration but
8		not said initial configuration;
9		providing said product in accordance with said alternate configuration but
10		not said initial configuration;
11		providing said order in accordance with said alternate configuration but
12		not said initial configuration; and
13		using a component with said product that is included in said alternate
14		configuration but not said initial configuration.

1	31.	The method of claim 27, wherein said order comprises a legal contract

1	32.	The method of claim 27, further comprising:
2		determining said non-binding attribute.

1	33.	The method of claim 27, further comprising:
2		adjusting a price associated with said order as a result of said exchanging
3		said initial configuration with said alternate configuration.

1	34.	The method of claim 27, wherein said order specifies different prices for different
2		configurations of said product.

1	35.	A method for completing an order for a product, comprising:
2		establishing an order involving a first component, wherein said order
3		includes a non-binding attribute associated with said first component;
4		determining a shortage of an amount of said first component needed to for
5		said order;

6   determining a second component that satisfies said non-binding attribute

7   for said order; and

8   exchanging said first component with said second component for said

9   order.

1   36.   The method of claim 35, wherein said establishing an order involving a first

2   component includes at least one of the following:

3   providing a notification to a customer regarding said non-binding

4   attribute;

5   receiving an order for a product that includes said first component;

6   allowing a customer to select a plurality of components for said product,

7   wherein said first component is one of said plurality of components;

8   allowing a customer to select said non-binding attribute;

9   providing a notification to a customer regarding said first component and

10 said second component and receiving consent from said customer to said non-

11 binding attribute;

12   providing a notification to a customer regarding a component and

13 receiving consent from the customer to use said component in said order;

14   providing a notification to a customer regarding a non-binding attribute

15 and receiving consent from said customer to use the non-binding attribute in the

16 order;

17   providing at least two options regarding a component and allowing a

18 customer to select from among the two options; and

19   providing a request to a customer regarding a non-binding attribute

20 associated with said first component.

1   37.   The method of claim 35, wherein said determining a shortage of an amount of

2   said first component needed for said order includes at least one of the following:

3   receiving a second order involving said first component, fulfillment of

4   which prevents fulfillment of said order with said first component;

5   determining availability of an amount of said first component needed to

6   fulfill said order;

7   determining that said order cannot be partially or completely filled due to

8   defects detected in said first component;

9   determining that a change in price for said first component makes it

10   disadvantageous to fill said order with said first component;

11   determining that a change in price for a second component makes it

12   disadvantageous to fill said order with said first component;

13   determining that a change in projected supply for said first component

14   makes it disadvantageous to fill said order with said first component;

15   determining that a change in projected supply for a second component

16   makes it disadvantageous to fill said order with said first component;

17   determining that a projected change in price for said first component

18   makes it disadvantageous to fill said order with said first component;

19   determining that a projected change in price for a second component

20   makes it disadvantageous to fill said order with said first component;

21   determining that an amount of said first component needed for said order

22   exceeds an amount of said first component that is available for said order; and

23   determining that an amount of said first component needed for said order

24   exceeds an amount of said first component in inventory.

1   38.   The method of claim 35, wherein said order comprises a legal contract.

1   39.   The method of claim 35, further comprising:

2   determining said non-binding attribute.

1   40.   The method of claim 35, further comprising:

2   adjusting a price associated with said order as a result of said exchanging

3   said first component with said second component.

1   41.   The method of claim 35, wherein said order specifies different prices for different

2   configurations of a product associated with said order.

1   42.   A system for facilitating an order for at least one product, comprising:

2   a memory;

3   a communication port; and

4   a processor connected to said memory and said communication port, said

5   processor being operative to:

6   establish an order for a product, wherein said order includes a first

7   component associated with said product and said order includes a non-

8   binding attribute associated with said first component;

9   determine a second component that satisfies said non-binding

10   attribute for said order; and

11   exchange said first component with said second component in said

12   order.

1   43.   A computer program product in a computer readable medium for facilitating an

2   order for at least one product, comprising:

3   first instructions for creating an order for a product, wherein said order

4   includes a first component associated with said product and said order includes a

5   non-binding attribute associated with said first component;

6   second instructions for identifying a second component that satisfies said

7   non-binding attribute for said order; and

8   third instructions for allowing use of said first component with said second

9   component in said order.